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VEGETABLE SEED

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On August 9, styles in vegetable seed packets, -- cartons and bags -- may show some change. We don't mean the shape, size, or general appearance of seed packages will change. But we do mean that after August 9 vegetable seed will wear labels that tell just what's in each package.

Here's why we say this: On August 9, 48 kinds of vegetable seed come under the provisions of the new Federal Seed Act. This includes seed of all of the common vegetables. The provisions of the Act cover all of these 48 different kinds, if they are shipped or hauled from one State to another, in other words if they move in interstate commerce.

In the past probably most of the vegetable seed sold has been labeled so the buyer could know what he was getting. There has always been plenty of "honestly labeled" vegetable seed. But under the new Federal Seed Act, all seed of the 48 kinds that are shipped in interstate commerce must be labeled so the buyer can know what he is getting.

This brings up the question, "What information does the buyer need in order to know what he is getting?" First, he'll want to know the kind and the variety of the seed. Under the law, this information must be on the package. The name of the shipper must be on the package, unless the person who handles the seed prefers to have his name on it along with a code mark to designate the shipper.

Then there's the question of germination. This is likewise important. Different kinds of vegetable seed have widely varying percentages of germination. So the officials who administer the Federal Seed Act have worked out "germination standards" for each of the 48 kinds that come under the Federal law. If the seed in a package is up to the standard or higher, no mention of this fact need be made on the label. But -- and don't miss this point -- if the seed is not up to standard, the carton must be marked "Below Standard." It must also show detailed results of the germination test with the date the test was completed. This information must be marked in a place and in a way so it's easy to read.

There is a time limit for which germination tests hold good. The regulations under which the Act is administered cover this. They say that no more than 5 months shall elapse between the last day of the month in which the seed is tested for germination and the day it is shipped in interstate commerce.

This means, for example, that seed tested on January 10 could be shipped without retesting for germination any time within five months after the last day of January. It could be shipped without retesting any time up to and including the last day of June.

These are the main requirements for labeling vegetable seeds under the new Federal Seed Act. However, persons who handle vegetable seed that comes within the provisions of the law, must use "proper precaution" to be sure the labeling as to variety is correct on all seeds that aren't distinguishable as to variety. Proper precaution means the buyer should get and keep a declaration of variety from the grower of such seed. And he should keep a sample from each lot of indistinguishable vegetable seed for not less than one year.

The purpose of these provisions under the new Federal Seed Act is to assure buyers of vegetable seed of "honest" labels, labels that will let the buyer know what is in each package of vegetable seed; not only labels that tell the truth, but that tell all of the truth.

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